In Congress, A Union Of Grief

WASHINGTON (UPI)—President Kennedy's assassination struck Congress Friday with soul-sickening shock. Then there was stunned grief, mingled with anger at the crime.

"My God ... my God ... what are we coming to," were the only words that Speaker John McCormack could utter when told that the 46-year-old President had been shot in Dallas.

McCormack's dazed response was echoed throughout the tragic afternoon by other senators and House members who had served with the slain Chief Executive before he entered the White House.

Summons All Senators

Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield immediately summoned all senators to the floor for a special period of prayer while the President was dying. He called the slaying "not only a great tragedy for the nation but it is, I think, a mark against the respectability and responsibility of some of our citizens."

Senate Republican Leader Everett M. Dirksen on learning of the shooting could only exclaim: "Oh God. This is the most distressing thing that could ever happen."

After the President died, Dirksen could still barely summon words.

He called the crime "incredible" and told newsmen: "I'm a little bewildered as I know the nation and the whole world to be."

Of the assassin, Dirksen said "the gates of hell must have congealed inside him." He mourned Kennedy as the victim of "a violent and indescribable hate."

Bursts Into Tears

Sen. Margaret Chase Smith, R-Maine, another who had served with Kennedy in the House and Senate, burst into tears when she was told the news while eating lunch.

There was anger against the perpetrator of the killing as well as mourning and eulogy for the dead President.

Sen. Richard B. Russell, D-Ga., leader of the Senate's Southern bloc, called it "this dastardly crime." He said: "The assassin's bullet has stricken a brilliant and dedicated statesman at the very height of his powers."

Rep. Hale Boggs, D-La., recalled that earlier this fall he had spoken in New Orleans trying to "calm the drums of hate against the President of the United States."

Bitterly, Boggs declared: "The radicals and the haters in politics and elsewhere have had their way. They are the ones who really pulled the trigger that killed a great American. But they shall not prevail."

House Republican Leader Charles A. Halleck, branded the assassination "an unspeakable crime against all the people of this country."

"The world should know," he said, "that in this hour of national tragedy, Americans stand together as one: shocked and grieved at this unbelievable news."

Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, D-N.Y., said every federal and state effort should be made to punish the guilty. The Negro congressman also said that "all Americans who have any sanity, any chracter, any religious beliefs, irrespective of color, political creed or religion, should now rally around Lyndon Johnson to try to lift America back to the level of prestige that has now been destroyed."

Rep. James Roosevelt, D-Calif., whose father was the last President to die while in office, said Kennedy would be remembered for "his willingness to battle for what he thought was right—such as civil rights—his faith in democracy and his desire to see it triumph."

Sen. Spessard L. Holland, D-Fla., turned his thoughts to the new President. He said: "I am sure that the Congress ... and all Americans will rally to the support of Lyndon Johnson as he assumes the lonely and heavy responsibilities of the presidency. May God grant him the wisdom and the strength to carry this awesome duty with courage and dignity."

Stirred With Revulsion

Rep. Bruce Alger, D-Tex., whose district contains downtown Dallas where the assassination occurred, had no immediate comment but later said: "No words can express our deep sorrow in this tragic hour. God alone can sustain us in our loss. Our hearts and prayers go out to Mrs. Kennedy and her children and to other members of the family."

Rep. Joe Pool, D-Tex., remarked: "The hearts of the people are stirred with revulsion. An animal lives among us in hideous madness."

And Senate Democratic whip Hubert H. Humphrey, Minn., who contested the presidential primaries with Kennedy in 1960, said: "America has lost a great President. The world has lost a great leader. I have lost a good friend. What an incredible tragedy."